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ABSTRACT

Although most educators agree that cross cultural education is a valuable component of the curriculum and that it offers students the opportunity to understand differences and commonalities among people, there is little agreement about how to teach such a subject. An anthroliterary approach to this discipline helps students understand and appreciate other cultures by narrative portrayals of the lifestyles, customs, and values of different ethnic groups. This portrayal can best be developed in the classroom through the use of a given culture's oral and/or written literature, and through implementation of learning activities that encourage students to actively use their powers of imagination, speculation, and reason. If educators are serious about increasing children's appreciation and understanding for different cultures, then they must explore and use resources that capture students' interests and spark their intellect. A case study of a unit using stories from the Ashanti people of West Africa demonstrates this approach in practice. (LP)

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CULTURE AT A DISTANCE:
AN ANTHROLITERARY APPROACH TO CROSS CULTURAL EDUCATION

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This paper presents the theoretical rationale and practical application of an anthroliterary approach to cross cultural education.

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CULTURE AT A DISTANCE:
AN ANTHROLITERARY APPROACH TO CROSS CULTURAL EDUCATION

During the last decade multicultural, global, and/or cross cultural education has become an important area of study within education. As Cortes (1983) notes, this interest has developed from the overdue recognition of the growing interrelatedness between the peoples of the world and the significance of our ethnic diversity within the United States. Both Congress and more than thirty-four states have passed legislation recognizing the importance of this educational concern (Giles, 1978; Grant, 1978).

Although most individuals agree that cross cultural education is worthwhile, there continues to be much debate over definitions, purposes, and approaches towards this goal. Within the curriculum field, most effort has been directed towards improving textbook materials so that more, unbiased attention is given to cultural groups from around the world and cultural minorities within this country. However, some teachers feel that more innovative approaches are needed to capture their students' imagination and appreciation of other cultures. While more accurate textbook information is important, these individuals believe that textbooks are severely limited in helping children gain an understanding of life from a different cultural perspective--that is, to see life as if they were a member of the cultural group being studied.

In addressing this concern, this paper describes an anthroliterary approach to cross cultural education. Originally developed by such noted anthropologists as Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux (1953) to study cultures inaccessible to direct observation, this approach uses the oral and/or written literature of a given cultural group in order to gain insight into their

existence. While Mead and Metraux's approach is more comprehensive than can be used in most elementary and/or middle schools, its basic methods can be adapted for classroom use.

An important step in educating children about other people is to explore a given group's cultural heritage. One often neglected resource that can be used in this exploration is traditional folklore since it is a primary source of cultural knowledge. That is, folktales were often used to teach the children of various cultures about their own heritage, values, and customs. By using an anthroliterary approach in the classroom, today's children will learn in the same way children have learned for centuries--by listening to and interpreting stories.[1] Unfortunately, most teachers have little knowledge of folklore, or how it can be used to enhance their students' understanding, respect, and appreciation for other cultures. With this in mind, this paper is divided into three sections. The first develops a rationale for using this approach in our classrooms. Second, some underlying concerns that need to be taken into consideration when using this approach are addressed. Finally, a case study of a unit that uses Anansi-the-Spider stories from the Ashanti people of West Africa is described to demonstrate this approach in practice.

Rationale

There are many reasons for using an anthroliterary approach to cross cultural education. Three of the most important rationales will be discussed.

Understanding Others

Perhaps the most often cited reason for teaching children about other cultures is to help them understand other people. However, as many sociologists and anthropologists note, understanding requires more than just learning a few facts about a given group of individuals. True understanding requires empathy and the ability to view life from different perspectives. Folklore

illuminates for children the different ways life can be viewed and lived. As Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1972, p. 138) suggest,

> ...folklore includes superstitions, medicinal practices, games, songs, festivals, dance rituals... Folklore is sometimes called the "mirror of a people." It reveals their characteristic efforts to explain and deal with the strange phenomena of nature; to understand and interpret the ways of human beings with each other; and to give expression to deep, universal emotions...

Folktales illustrate differences, but also the common bonds that tie the human species together. Mitchem (1981) points out that folklore from many different cultures often contain similar themes such as: joy, despair, courage, beauty, and responsibility. Carl Jung, for example, based much of his psychological theory concerning the collective unconscious and archetypes from his discovery of the common themes found in folklore throughout the world (Henderson, 1964). An anthroliterary approach develops cultural understanding within classrooms through the dramatic portrayal of the lifestyle, beliefs, and values of other people. Folklore allows students to identify and empathize with characters and situations that reflect experiences beyond their immediate surroundings. Unlike facts and figures, folktales can project students into a different time and place thereby providing a basis for cultural understanding.

Understanding Self

If one purpose for using folklore in the curriculum is for students to gain an understanding of others, another is to increase one's self-understanding. As Barnet (1978) states,

> Like other good literature, folklore helps people understand themselves because it treats values as living forces which motivate behavior. Because folktales often dramatize conflict and change in a simple, direct way, they allow the reader to see clearly how someone else has met and dealt with these aspects of life.

Bettelheim (1976) has noted that children are often faced with complex situations and ethical dilemmas, and that folktales provide concrete, rather than abstract, reasons for living an ethical life.

In using folklore in the classroom, students have the opportunity to observe, compare, identify, and vicariously experience life from a distance. This distance allows them to reflect upon what they learn and if appropriate, to apply it to their own lives. For example, we have known a number of children whose appreciation for nature and the environment has dramatically increased from listening to and reading Native American folklore. By introducing students to new perspectives, they have an opportunity to broaden their horizons and thus grow.

Active Learning

The final reason for using an anthroliterary approach to teach children about other cultures is that it promotes active learning. In most classrooms, student learning is relatively passive. Through textbooks and workbooks, children are given pre-determined, explicit cultural facts for them to consume. As previously mentioned, an anthroliterary approach emphasizes the portrayal of other cultural groups. Instead of being told what another culture is like students must infer and draw their own conclusions based upon the picture presented to them in the literature. Portrayal is not a common term among curriculum designers, but it is an exciting one since it calls upon children to use their formidable powers of imagination, speculation, and reason; rather than just their ability to memorize. Students initially create a picture in their minds of the people and setting illustrated within the folktales. Based upon this early image, they make speculations about these people and their life. These conjectures are then analyzed as additional stories are examined and other resources are explored.

Since the folklore of other cultures often presents children with alternative ways and perspectives of living, through dialogue, students can be encouraged to reflect on basic questions of life.

> An anthroliterary approach to learning continually links the great themes to concepts, concepts to activities, and all are established through written and oral language in the context of the historical settings and human experiences from which they arise (Mitchem, 1981).

Many folktales raise issues of: what it means to be a human being, ethics, spirituality, and/or interpersonal relationships. As Matthews (1980, pp. 56-66) concisely illustrates, even young children have the potential to consider philosophical issues that are presented in stories. In an age when passive drill-work and tests of memorization seem to dominate the education of our children, perhaps the most important rationale for using an anthroliterary approach is that it offers students the opportunity to actively use their minds.

Underlying Concerns

Curriculum materials are not independent of the teachers and students who use them. As Connelly (1972) points out, teachers often play a role in determining curriculum content even when detailed materials are given to them. An anthroliterary approach reinforces the teacher's role as curriculum developer. With input from students, the teacher decides which culture to study, develops the topics or themes of the study, researches the sources that will be used to study this culture, plans activities to illuminate the topics of the unit, and develops a procedure for evaluation. Since the teacher plays a major role in developing this curriculum, there are a couple of underlying concerns that should be taken into consideration when teachers use this approach.

Authenticity of Knowledge

One criticism of using literature to teach children about other cultures is that the information found in these sources is not scientific, and thus cannot be trusted as factual. Since folktales are told and retold and with each translation the stories change, the information found within them is unreliable. This criticism comes from the faulty assumption that true knowledge

is constant, absolute, and free from subjective interpretation. However, as Piaget (1971) points out, there simply is no such thing as unchanging, objective social knowledge. Even when an anthropologist goes into the field to study another culture, his/her conclusions are based upon his/her subjective perceptions and attitudes. Just because information is found in a textbook does not mean that it is valid. For example, as recently as 1978 gross inaccuracies, omissions, and ethnocentric biases were discovered in chapters concerning Africa from two popular junior high school textbooks (Hall, 1978). Wolcott (1981) sees this lack of sensitivity as a continuing problem within textbooks that deal with multi-cultural issues.

Although knowledge is always subject to change and interpretation, it does not mean that this criticism should be ignored. For example, Banfield and Wilson (1983) illuminate how modern, award winning renditions of traditional folklore can perpetuate misleading, negative sterotypes of African people. In researching folklore, the teacher should use collections by individuals who have an intimate knowledge of the culture and stories from the group being studied. However, as with any resource, the teacher should emphasize the tentative nature of the information found in folktales. Students should be encouraged to compare knowledge gained from one source with other resources. For example, Mead and Metraux (1953, pp. 41-49) point out the value of using an informant to substantiate findings obtained from a culture's literature. After making some initial conclusions based upon a variety of folktales, students could interview an individual from the cultural group being studied. In addition, students could read reports from anthropologists to cross check their own conclusions. If the students are too young to conduct this type of research, the teacher can do it and summarize his/her findings for the children.

Ethnocentrism

Another issue that needs to be considered in teaching children about other cultures is the problem of ethnocentricity. As Grant (1977) points out, traditionally both teachers and students have lived in and been educated for a monocultural society. Rather than appreciating and valuing the cultural diversity within this society and the world, until recently, we have been taught to view different cultural groups as deficient when compared to white, upper-middle class America. For example, at the turn of the century when a great influx of immigrants came to this country, the schools took an active role in discounting the value of in-coming ethnic groups. In 1909 Ellwood Cubberly, a leading educator at the time, summarized the then prevailing attitude.

> Our task is to assimilate these people as part of the American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law, order, and popular government... (Pucinski, 1972, p. 76).

Both in and out of school, we have been socialized to accept mainstream American culture as the most viable way to live (Samuels, 1973; Cortes, 1979; Schramm et al., 1961; Miller, 1979).[2] This attitude is especially strong when viewing traditional hunting, gathering, and/or agriculturally based ethnic groups. Many of us have grown up believing that our written history, buildings, production of consumer goods, and governmental institutions reflect our superiority. Studies have shown that by the time children enter school they have many well-developed prejudicial and stereotyped attitudes concerning ethnic groups within our society and foreign cultures (Goodman, 1964; Lambert and Klineberg, 1967).

These ethnocentric attitudes make it difficult to foster an understanding of other cultures within classrooms. An individual who learns just the facts about a race or culture may not necessarily be developing respect for other ethnic groups. Allport (1958, p. 451) suggests that, "Information seldom

sticks unless mixed with attitudinal glue." For example, a student may look upon storytelling as an inferior, instead of unique form of literature and/or history. Teachers need to seriously consider the problem of ethnocentrism when teaching children about other cultures.

First, teachers should examine their own prejudices and biases. Teachers ought to ask themselves if they feel threatened by or superior to people with different cultural backgrounds. All of us have been raised with ethnocentric biases to some degree. As many researchers have noted, teachers are strong models for children, and it is important for teachers to be as free of cultural bias as possible.

Second, it is important to discuss these issues with the children as part of one's units on other cultures. Students should be given the chance to express their ideas in a nonthreatening environment, to see how their perceptions of other people have been and continue to be developed, and eventually to gain an acceptance of themselves and people who are different from themselves. Hanvey (1982) refers to this awareness as "perspective consciousness." Anderson (1982) defines this consciousness as:

> Students (ability to) recognize that their own view of the world is not universally shared, that this view has been, and continues to be, shaped by influences that often escape their conscious detection, and that others have views of the world that are profoundly different from their own. Students also need to develop the ability to project themselves into alternative perspectives.

For students who have gained an awareness, understanding, and acceptance of varying perspectives, the recognition of differences will not foster hostility, rejection, or self denial.

An Anthroliterary Approach in Practice: A Unit on the Traditional Ashanti Culture

As will be demonstrated below, there are four basic procedures in using

an anthroliterary approach in the classroom. First, a specific culture is chosen, and topics or "areas of content" are developed as a guide for the study of this culture. Second, students study the folklore and examine other resources that increase their knowledge of this culture. Third, students participate in activities that help them gain an understanding of this culture. Finally, students share what they have learned, and their contribution to the unit is evaluated.[3]

As previously mentioned, folklore illuminates the traditional lifestyle, customs, and values of a given cultural group. One culture with a rich oral heritage is the Ashanti people of West Africa.[4] The primary focus of this unit was the study of "Ananseseme(s)," folktales of Kwaku Anansi, a spider who "...acts like a human being in a human setting" (Finnegan, 1970). He is a hero and a trickster; he is clever and foolish; he is giving and selfish. He represents the "...traits and personalities which people both recognize (as worthwhile) and fear..." in themselves (Finnegan, 1970). The tales of Anansi are both amusing and instructional, oftentimes teaching a moral. The unit described in this paper is meant for upper elementary or middle school; however, it is important to remember that with some alterations, folklore can be used with any age group.

Introducing the Unit

There are many ways to introduce a unit depending upon one's aims. For this lesson there were three main goals: 1) to establish what the students already knew about the subject, 2) to establish what they would like to learn about the subject, and 3) to arouse their interest and curiosity. To meet these goals, the students participated in a discussion and created a webbing (Kohl, 1976, pp. 37-54; Rachelson and Copeland, 1983) to determine the topics of study. After a few introductory remarks that announced our desire to

study the traditional Ashanti culture of West Africa, the students were asked what they would want to learn about these people. As the students volunteered statements, their ideas were catagorized on the blackboard. For example, some responded: "What kind of food did they eat?" "What kind of houses did they live in?" and "What kind of religion did they have?" After each response, the students speculated on possible answers to their questions. The discussion was guided in this manner, generating questions and hypotheses from the students until the webbing had sufficient topics for study.[5]

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insert figure #1

At this point, students were asked how these topics could be examined. They responded with traditional methods such as: reading textbooks, watching film strips, conducting research etc. It was explained that in addition to these methods, the students would learn about the Ashanti culture in the same way the Ashanti children have historically learned--by listening to Anansi-the-Spider stories. The students were then introduced to Anansi through the story, "All Stories Are Anansi's."[6] It described how all tales once belonged to Nyame, the God of all things. By accomplishing three difficult and courageous tasks, Anansi was able to buy the tales from Nyame. Thus, the Ashanti owned them.

After listening to the story, the students were asked to work on an art project such as drawing a picture of Anansi, Nyame, or a scene from the story. In this way, the students created an initial image of the characters and settings as a basis for continued study.

It is important to note that the webbing was saved and used throughout the unit. As the class's knowledge and understanding of the Ashanti grew, the

webbing was more fully developed or modified. In this way, the students saw how their ideas and insights helped determine the course of the unit.

Learning Through Folklore

As students studied more stories, they began to accumulate a wealth of information about the traditional Ashanti culture. On the surface, the students learned many facts that offered a glimpse into the daily lives and customs of these people. A number of stories illustrated family relations. For example, among the Ashanti, a man's sons were not related as closely to him as were his nephews and nieces (Bleeker, 1966). "The Coming of Yams" told why sons didn't inherit their father's wealth. Many stories dealt with food. Yams, corn, and cassavas were mentioned frequently. Hunting and farming were portrayed as the major ways of obtaining food (e.g. "Anansi and the Elephant Go Hunting," "The Planting Party"). Other stories revealed that: drums were used to communicate over long distances, trials were used to decide guilt or innocence, and dancing was part of festivals (e.g. "Osebo's Drum," "Anansi Borrows Money," "Anansi's Hat Shaking Dance").

In addition to facts about daily life, different themes emerged from Anansesem(s). One common theme was famine. Many stories began with words like, "It was a time of famine..." Lack of food was often the prime motivation for Anansi's devious plots. For example, in "Anansi Plays Dead" Anansi pretended to die in order to steal food from his own family because of his fear of going hungry. Implicit in many stories was the theme of the weak conquering the strong. Anansi often overcame stronger animals by outwitting them. In "All Stories Are Anansi's" he subjugated powerful hornets, a large python, and a fierce leopard by outsmarting them.

Overtly, then, many facts and themes about the traditional Ashanti culture were presented in the stories. In a more subtle way, Anansesem(s)

mirrored the deeply ingrained cultural values of the Ashanti people. In presenting these values, many stories taught a moral lesson. Generally, these teachings were often drawn from Anansi's defeats. For example, perhaps because the Ashanti experienced periods of little food, greed was greatly discouraged. In "Anansi Plays Dead" Anansi was caught stealing food and was deeply shamed. "Two Feasts for Anansi" described how his thin belly came from his selfishness. "Where the ropes had squeezed him around the middle he had become very small. The spider carries with him forever the mark of his greed" (Courlander, 1957, p. 19).

The importance of cooperation, honesty, and humility appeared in many Anansesem(s). For example, "The Planting Party" demonstrated that if individuals did not overcome their own desires and work together then important tasks could not be completed. "Nyame's Well" described how the frog's lying caused misery throughout the land, and how Nyame took the frog's tail away as punishment for his dishonesty. In "Anansi's Hat Shaking Dance" all of Anansi's hair was permanently burned off because he was caught in an act of hypocrisy and vanity.

Learning Activities

Facts, themes, and moral teachings all emerged from Anansi's tales. An anthroliterary approach gave students an opportunity to learn from, interact with, and expand upon the folklore of this culture. It was important for the students to listen to, read, discuss, and interpret meanings from the folktales being studied. In addition, students participated in a number of follow-up activities that: 1) illuminated the topics of study developed at the beginning of the unit, and 2) linked these topics to the folktales. As Rudman (1976, pp. 369-374) and others have described, creative activities were used to help students reflect upon the substance of the stories

(Carlson, 1970; Reasoner, 1968). For example, after reading "Osebo's Drum" students attempted to make their own drums and develop a code to send messages. Through this activity, students learned to appreciate the craftsmanship that went into producing drums, and they came to realize the quality of thought needed to develop a communication language. Other activities included: creating film strips based on a particular story; growing, cooking, and/or eating the food mentioned in the stories; and, of course, storytelling.

Evaluation

As the unit progressed, it was important to evaluate the students' involvement. What factual knowledge had they retained? What concepts had they learned? What kinds of generalizations had they formulated? Had the students gained an appreciation for this culture? Based upon Herman's (1968) suggestions, three evaluative activities were used to help answer these questions. First, a summary discussion and final webbing was completed. In this discussion, students compared their early questions and speculations to the information they had obtained through their study of Ashanti folklore and culture.

Second, using small groups, students created dramatic plays based upon a given theme. For example, one theme was "cooperation." Each group chose a story that reflected the theme given to them. They produced a short skit that portrayed the folktale and reflected points of interest concerning the theme.[7] In addition, each group developed a "fact sheet" (Ahern and Lucas, 1975, pp. 14-19), on the information illustrated through their skit.

A final means for evaluation was writing projects. Students chose from a list of possible topics that demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the Ashanti culture. Some examples were: 1) research what is happening to the Ashanti today and compare them to their traditional lifestyle,

2) research the differences and/or similarities between the information obtained through the folklore and information obtained from other resources, 3) write an Anansi-the-Spider story that reflects the facts, themes, and/or values found in traditional Anansesem(s).

The old traditions of the Ashanti culture were not forgotten. They lived on in the tales of Kwaku Anansi. Through the stories and imaginative learning activities, the Ashanti heritage came to life for these students.

Conclusion

Most individuals within our society agree that cross cultural education is a worthwhile goal. The study of other cultures offers students the opportunity to understand the differences and commonalities that exist between people. It also provides children with material for self reflection. Although these goals are considered important, there is little agreement about how to arrive at them. From an anthroliterary perspective, it is not enough to simply drill and test children about specific facts related to a given cultural group. Memorizing facts does not necessarily result in understanding. From this perspective, the best way to develop children's understanding and appreciation for other cultures is to narratively portray the lifestyle, customs, and values of these ethnic groups. This portrayal can best be developed in our classrooms through the use of a given culture's oral and/or written literature, and through the implementation of learning activities that encourage students to actively use their powers of imagination, speculation, and reason. If we are serious about increasing our children's appreciation and understanding for different cultures, then we must explore and use resources that capture their interests and spark their intellect. Folklore is a fertile field ready to be cultivated by adventurous teachers and students.

Notes

[1]As a number of individuals have pointed out, folktales are excellent examples of children's literature. They are clear and easy to comprehend, they portray individuals and settings in terms children can usually understand, and they often provide children with concrete approaches to life's problems.

[2]It is important to note that this type of socialization is common. Most cultures teach their children that their heritage is superior to other cultures. However, if we want to develop greater understanding between the peoples of the world, we must begin to alter this type of socialization. We must begin to teach our children that they should take pride in their own cultural heritage, but at the same time recognize the value of all cultures.

[3]This approach to curriculum development rejects rigid, pre-determined behavioral objectives as the basis for classroom work. However, a structure is needed for inquiry into subject matter. For a more complete description of this alternative approach to curriculum development see Goodman (1983).

[4]As part of our work, we researched the folklore of three cultural groups (Native Americans from the plain states, Yiddish from eastern Europe circa 1500-1900, and the Ashanti of West Africa). We chose to illustrate the Ashanti folklore in this paper because of its availability to most classroom teachers.

[5]In developing the web, question marks were placed after the students' questions and/or speculations concerning the Ashanti culture. In addition, we contributed to the webbing when students overlooked important topics.

[6]All of the stories mentioned in this paper can be found in either Courlander (1957) or Rattray (1969).

[7]A teacher might record or, if possible, video tape these skits to facilitate a more accurate analysis of facts, concepts, and generalizations evidenced in the children's dialogue and actions.

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Figure #1
Initial Web of Ashanti Culture